



## MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

### Memorandum

Date: May 17, 2010

To: Mississippi Licensed Ambulance Services  
Mississippi Designated Trauma Care Regions

From: Bureau of Emergency Medical Services/Trauma Care System Development

RE: EMS and Patient Choice in the Emergency Traumatic Setting

At the scene of any crash or other event involving traumatic injury, emergency medical services (EMS) providers must identify those patients who are at greatest risk for severe injury and must determine the most appropriate facility to which to transport patients with different injury types and severities.

This decision process includes personnel ascertaining the nature and severity of a patient's injury, providing treatment, and determining the most appropriate destination facility. Determining the most appropriate facility for a given patient's injury is a complex process that involves the patient's clinical situation, patient and family member preferences, state laws or regulations that might affect destination choices (e.g., Mississippi State Trauma Plan), and hospital and EMS system capability and capacity.

In Mississippi, an emergency medical technician will assess the patient and based on their findings will follow the proper protocol for treatment and transport. For trauma, on-line Medical Control directs the ambulance provider through written or verbal protocols (in accordance with the Mississippi State Trauma System Plan) to the nearest appropriate trauma center. With the passage of the revised Mississippi EMS Laws, Rules and Regulations in February of 2010, it is now mandatory that licensed EMS services and protocols follow the Mississippi State and Regional Trauma System Plans. (These plans can be found on the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) website at [http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/ static/30,2174,99.html](http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/static/30,2174,99.html).)

The preferred method to reduce traumatic injury is through educating the community through injury prevention. However, when this fails and/or injury occurs, EMS personnel must ensure that patients receive prompt and appropriate emergency care at the scene and

are transported to the most appropriate Mississippi Trauma Care Center for further evaluation and treatment.

Mississippi's ultimate goal is to transport the right patient to the right hospital at the right time. As healthcare professionals, we can defend what is best medical practice for the traumatic injured patient – following the state guidelines and transporting to the most appropriate trauma care center.


But there does exist those few occasions in which the competent patient (awake, alert, oriented to person, place, time and events) and/or family insists on transport to a facility different from what is mandated by regional triage and transport guidelines. While not wanting to engage the patient or their family in a debate over appropriate hospital destinations, it's nonetheless critical to try to make the patient understand the EMS service's obligation to transport to the appropriate facility (e.g. patient's decision may be in conflict with standard medical practice, EMS protocols, organized trauma care system).

As EMS is a delegated practice, any deviation from protocols should be communicated and approved by medical control. However, if the patient refuses transport to the recommended destination, has been informed of the risks of that decision and the benefits of the being seen at the recommended destination, the patient choice destination is in the response area (not causing undue burden on the EMS agency), and medical control authorizes, the patient's choice should be honored. When this occurs, EMS should thoroughly document such cases including obtaining a patient signature acknowledging refusal to be transported to the recommended destination.

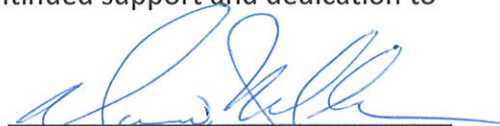
Remember that though patient choice is defined as the right of a competent patient to make decisions about their own healthcare, in emergency situations where family or patient calls for EMS, they are more likely relying on the expertise of EMS personnel to determine transport destination. As a general rule, once a patient is in the custody of the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), the EMT should follow the transportation regulations and guidelines as they exist.

EMS is faced with these types of complex situations daily. As Mississippi stands in the forefront of trauma care, field personnel should ensure the patient choice is respected when appropriate; that protocols are followed; that the most clinically appropriate care is furnished to the patient on a timely basis and that deviation from any of the aforementioned are approved by medical control.

If you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact this office at 601-576-7380. Thank you for your continued support and dedication to Mississippi EMS.



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